

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Ramadhān: Have You Got What It Takes?

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There are things in life which are not very important, those which are *quite* important and then those things which are **absolutely vital** for our collective well-being.

Let this be a reminder to me and anyone else who wishes to read on – there is simply nothing more vital for us in our very short and limited lives than to take absolute maximum benefit from the blessed month of Ramadhān.

The really interesting thing about the statement of Allāh, the Most High:

وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَ إِتْنَفَعُ آلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٥٥)

“So remind (them), for indeed the reminder benefits those who have faith,”

(Adh Dhariyat 51, 55)

is that those who have the pure characteristics of faith do indeed benefit, even though human nature by itself would seem to oppose that. Isn't that sadly true? When someone believes they know what to do, they don't necessarily appreciate being told again how to do it. If someone believes that they've heard everything they need to hear, it takes a seriously patient and magnanimous person to sit there and hear it again.

By now we've certainly heard all the Prophetic narrations on the blessings of this very special time; a time in which our righteous ones delight as the gates of Paradise are flung open, and in which our sinful ones breathe a sigh of relief and take time to reflect as the gates of Hell are locked up.

So at this moment of clarity, where the stomachs, hearts, eyes, ears, tongue and mind are all enjoying their greatest moment of purity, let us all try and make sure that we profit from the following points gleaned from the advice of our Pious Predecessors ...

1. Make sure that this blessed month becomes a period of accounting for your actions, a revision of your daily routine, an opportunity for the betterment of your life for all your years to come. To enter Ramadhān not believing it to be so will be a total loss. You've actually made it all the way here now, so let's reap the harvest! Think about all those

who were aiming for this month but found a dark grave instead. Reflect on all those who woke in the morning but found that their evenings never materialised.

Consider for just a second as our scholars said: if you can't change your ways and gain at such a blessed time then at what time will you change?!

2. Try to make sure you perform all of the *tarāwīh* prayers in congregation for the Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

“Whoever prays with the Imam until he leaves, it is written for him that he prayed the entire night.”

3. Do not be wasteful or extravagant with your wealth, for not only is that impermissible, but you reduce the opportunities of giving more in charity for which you could be rewarded for. They said about the Prophet, peace be upon him, that he gave in charity especially during Ramadhân like the one who didn't fear or even recognise poverty.

4. Commit yourself to continue after Ramadhân that which you have prepared yourself to do during Ramadhân. The salaf would say:

“The sign of one's fasting being accepted from him in Ramadhân is the continuation of his good actions and character after Ramadhân.”

5. Remember: this is a month of worship and hence action, not lethargy and sleeping. This is even more relevant here in the West considering winter is so close with its short days and long nights. It is well known from the Companions, in emulation of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, that they used to say:

“Reap the benefit of winter by fasting its days and standing (in prayer) during the nights.”

6. Make your tongue habitual in the *dhikr* of Allāh so that you don't become from those:

“... who do not remember Allāh except little.”

7. When you feel the pangs of hunger, just remember how weak you actually are, how dependent you are upon food and other such necessities from the immense blessings of Allāh, may He be glorified.

8. Make a concerted effort to permanently leave that which doesn't benefit you, but rather causes you harm. This is even more so when you are fasting. Maymûn used to say:

“The weakest of fasts is that in which only food and drink is left out.”

9. Remember: your actions are a trust from Allāh so audit yourself like any successful company does; have you performed and fulfilled your deeds as is deserving of them? This obviously applies to all our actions such as prayer, *dhikr*, manners but particularly fasting. Ibn Rajab, may Allāh have mercy upon him, said:

“Our fasts need istighfâr to make up for their deficiencies, and good deeds to intercede for them.”

10. Hasten to seek forgiveness from those whom you have oppressed in any way, before they take from your (very few) good deeds. Don't forget, the greatest oppressive tool is the tongue so tether it as strongly as possible. Sha'bi narrated that 'Umar, may Allāh be pleased with him, said:

“Fasting is not just refraining from food and drink, but refraining from lying, falsehood, backbiting and swearing (by Allāh).”

Abu al-'Âliyah, may Allāh have mercy upon him, used to say:

“The fasting one is in a continual state of worship until he says about another person that which they would not like to hear.”

11. Strive to feed the fasting one so that you can obtain a reward equal to his. Ibn 'Umar, may Allāh be pleased with him, used to always break his fast sharing with the poor; if any of his family tried to prevent him from that, he would refuse to spend the night with them. It was also reported from him that whenever someone would come to him asking for food, he would give them his share and then return home to find his family had eaten what was left of food in his house. He would not let on and would end his fasting day without eating anything.

12. Know that Allāh is the Most Generous and that He is the Most Merciful. He accepts the repentance of the penitent, more so than ever at such a special time.

13. If you have committed a sin or done something wrong which Allāh, may He be glorified, has concealed for you from the people, know that this is an opportunity for

you to seek repentance for those mistakes. Hasten to seek forgiveness and make sure that you do not return back to that sin.

14. Try to increase your knowledge of the explanation of the Qur’ān(*tafsīr*), the narrations of the Messenger, his biography (*sīrah*), and the principles of our religion – to seek such sacred knowledge is one of the highest forms of worship.

15. Stay away from such company and people which don’t benefit you; try to accompany righteous good folk as much as you can. Good people always spread their blessings to others.

16. Going significantly early to the Mosques is a sign of great love and desire to please Allāh; a sign that you are in need of him at all times, not just those times in which all the congregation are together. Abu Hurayrah, may Allāh be pleased with him, said:

“The Companions would often spend much of their fast in the Mosque so as to purify it (i.e. purify the fast itself from useless talk, gossip, backbiting etc).”

17. Pay attention to those who are under your authority such as your family, guiding them to that which will benefit them in their *dīn*, for they will far more willingly take their example from you than from other people.

18. Do not go to extremes by preparing many different dishes for the *iftār* meal. This leaves the women of the house no opportunity to benefit during the daytime of Ramadhān such as reciting the Qur’ān etc., especially if they are just busy cooking all day.

19. Reduce the amount of time you spend shopping in the night-time during Ramadhān, especially the last ten nights. This will prevent you wasting your time at such a precious and blessed period of your life.

20. Strive to spend these last ten special nights of Ramadhān standing in prayer. Remember: there is one particular night amongst these ten, known as *laylat al-qadr* which is in fact greater than a thousand months of worship. Surely to hit the jackpot on such a night is beyond our wildest dreams yet it is a jackpot available to everyone with no need to purchase a ticket and no need to take any risk – that’s gambling *dīn* style.

21. Don’t forget that ‘Eid is a special day of thanksgiving to our Lord, so don’t make it a day where you lose control of yourself, wasting all the good works of your heart and soul as it kept your desires in check for the entire month.

22. Set aside for yourself, even but for a small time, a period of isolation in the mosque known as *i'tikāf* – you will probably never enjoy such an intensely beneficial period for your soul to reflect upon how it is so cultured by day-to-day life in the 21st Century. This period of respite for the heart, mind and soul will allow you to replenish your vital organs with what they really need – the elixir of life which is nothing other than to be immersed in the worship of Allāh, the Most Exalted.

23. On the festive day of 'Eid as you enjoy yourself with your family, take a brief moment to remember all those brothers and sisters of ours who are orphans, stricken by poverty, famine and war. Know that if you have the ability to make a difference, hasten to such an excellent deed; if you are unable, do not forget to thank Allāh for His unlimited favours He bestows upon us.

24. Set aside for yourself regular days of fasting throughout the year – don't just make your relationship with fasting limited to Ramadhān only. Now that you have seen the rewards on offer for the fasting one, his special entrance of *ar-Rayyān* in Paradise, his supplication which is not rejected, his closeness to his Lord during his fast, his moment of joy as he breaks it, his increased ability to refrain from the bad and embrace the good – now that you've actualised these benefits, carry them over to the six days of Shawwāl just after Ramadhān which is equivalent to fasting the entire year! Don't forget also the middle three 'bright' days of every month, Mondays and Thursdays when our actions are presented to our Lord, as well as a host of other special occasions to double up from such as the Days of 'Arafah, Tāsū'ah, 'Āshūrā' etc.

25. Finally, reflect upon your overall condition; make an audit of all your daily affairs so that you can identify areas for improvement and rectification. These will include: sticking to the congregational prayers, paying *zakāt* fully and on time, maintaining your family ties, being honourable with the parents, being mindful of your neighbours, rectifying old feuds and problems between previous friends and colleagues, cutting out extravagance and the wasting of wealth, culturing and educating those under your guardianship, being concerned with the affairs of your fellow Muslim brothers and sisters around the world, delighting in and then acting upon sincere advice, protecting oneself for *riyā'* (showing off), loving for your brother that which you love for yourself, not allowing yourself to fall into the trap of backbiting others. Carry on reciting the Qur'ān and reflecting deeply upon its meanings and last but certainly not least, humble yourself as you listen to His Words being recited.

The list could simply go on and on – surely there are enough points here to make even the most heedless one reflect upon their state and consider changing their actions for the better.

O Allāh, give us the ability and strength to make this Ramadhân *our* Ramadhân, a time for change and maturity, a time for quality and success, *amīn*.

May the Peace and Blessings of Allāh be upon His Beloved Messenger, his family and all those who follow in his footsteps until the Final Day.